

MURKIN

CRIME WATCH

THIS week 20 years ago Cardinal Albino Luciani, Archbishop of Venice, was elected Pope John Paul I in Rome. The white smoke issued from

the Sistine Chapel and the diminutive, white-cassocked figure of St Peter's, to a roar of acclamation from the crowd below.

It had been one of the shortest papal conclaves in the history of the Vatican and one of the most joyous. Seldom had there been so strong a feeling among assembled cardinals that their choice of new Pope was the choice of God. Just 33 days later, on 28 September 1978, John Paul II lay dead in his apartment — alone and neglected, with no doctor to succour him, or priest to administer the last rites.

Was he murdered? Rumours of foul play began to circulate almost immediately. The theory given, plausibly in several books at the time, was that the Pope was poisoned because he had made it known that he was going to put an end to corruption at the Vatican Bank, which was run by the Red Gang, the Italian Mafia.

For instance, although he publicly supported his predecessor Pope Paul VI's encyclical Humanae Vitae against birth control, he had made it clear that he was going to overturn every detail of that September night. In the official account issued

20 years ago this week
John Paul I died after

33 days as Pope. Now even
one of his own cardinals says
he may have been poisoned

CHRISTOPHER
HUDSON

Lia Bent, who attended his deathbed, was an tame, the questioner. Contrary to the medical investigations were made. Secretary of State Camillo Villot forbade an autopsy on the grounds that no Pope was ever given a postmortem. Even though Pope Pius VIII was given one in 1830. And John Paul's medicines mysteriously vanished from his bed.

PAYING

death
accused
suspicion

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The San Francisco Chronicle

DECEMBER 28, 1990, FRIDAY, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: DAILY DATEBOOK; Pg. E1

LENGTH: 1236 words

HEADLINE: The Vatican Connection in 'Godfather 3'

BYLINE: Don Lattin, Chronicle Religion Writer

BODY:

Francis Ford Coppola's latest installment of "The Godfather" saga resurrects two stories the Vatican would like to forget: its involvement in the scandalous collapse of Banco Ambrosiano and a controversial 1984 claim that a newly elected Pope John Paul I was murdered after he began to clean up the Vatican Bank.

"The Godfather Part III" is about the struggle between forgiveness and revenge, love and fear, redemption and corruption. It is a story of corruption in all sectors of society, including the Catholic Church, and the Godfather's realization that "the higher I go, the crookeder it becomes."

The screenplay, written by Coppola and "Godfather" novelist Mario Puzo, borrows heavily from a real-life scandal that rocked the fiscal foundations of the Holy See during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The story unfolds against a Vatican backdrop of other tumultuous changes in the history of the church -- the 1978 death of Pope Paul VI, the consecration of John Paul I, and John Paul I's sudden death after only 33 days as the Vicar of Christ.

CHURCH RESPONSE

Henry Herx, director of the office of film and broadcasting for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said he does not consider "The Godfather Part III" to be "anti-Catholic."

In a movie review intended for Catholic newspapers and magazines, Herx said the picture's "fictional treatment of the so-called Vatican Bank scandal cannot be taken seriously."

"The movie is in no way anti-religious, though some may find it outrageously insensitive to the feelings of Catholic viewers," he said. "The story of some corrupt Vatican officials is so highly fictionalized that no one should take it seriously."

BUSINESS INTERESTS

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The Vatican Connection in 'Godfather 3' The San Francisco Chronicle DECEMBER 28, 1990, FRIDAY, FINAL EDITION

Coppola's film revolves around an attempt by Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) to transform his organized crime empire into a "'legitimate'" business in the late 1970s by assuming control of International Immobiliare, a huge fictional holding company with business interests in Europe and the United States.

Twenty-five percent of the company is owned by the Vatican Bank, and papal approval is required before Corleone can take over the corporation.

'Godfather III' opens with Corleone's donating \$ 100 million to the Roman Catholic Church, and being honored by the Church in New York with the Order of St. Sebastian.

Several scenes later, Corleone is trying to convince Archbishop Gilday, a fictional top official with the Vatican Bank, that he has gone legitimate and that the church should approve his attempted takeover of International Immobiliare.

When Corleone offers to deposit \$ 500 million in the Vatican Bank, the archbishop reminds him that "'the power to absolve debt is more difficult than the power to forgive,'" and demands \$ 600 million for Vatican approval -- money the church needs to cover a \$ 700 million deficit.

The Godfather agrees, but reminds His Excellency that he should "'never underestimate the value of forgiveness.'"

'CLEANING HOUSE' AT THE BANK

As Corleone prepares to take over the holding company, Pope Paul VI falls ill and Vatican approval is delayed. After the pontiff's death, Pope John Paul I is elected. Corleone hears reports that the pope is "'cleaning house'" at the Vatican Bank.

"He should be careful," Corleone advises. "It is dangerous to be an honest man."

Amid rumors of a plot to poison the pope, John Paul I is found dead one morning in his papal apartment.

ALLEGATIONS IN 1984 BOOK

If this story sounds familiar, it is very much along the lines of the controversial 1984 book by British author David Yallop, "In God's Name: An Investigation Into the Murder of Pope John Paul I."

Yallop alleges that Cardinal Albino Luciani, who took the name John Paul I, was poisoned by shadowy financiers with Vatican connections. His charge was denounced by the Vatican in 1984 as an "'absurd fantasy.'" Yallop presented no direct evidence that the pope was murdered nor did he name his Vatican sources.

According to the Vatican, the 65-year-old pontiff died of a heart attack at about 11 p.m. on Sept. 28, 1978. His body was discovered the next morning by his private secretary.

In the film, Cardinal Luciani is called "'Cardinal Lamberto'" but assumes the real-life name of John Paul I after his election as pope. For some reason, the screenplay places the short reign of John Paul I in 1979, rather than 1978.

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The Vatican Connection in 'Godfather 3' The San Francisco Chronicle DECEMBER 28,
1990, FRIDAY, FINAL EDITION

OPERATIVES OF 'P-2'

Yallop charged in his book that operatives of Propaganda Due, a secret Masonic lodge with purported links to the Vatican Bank, were involved in the pope's death. ''P-2,'' as the lodge is known, is mentioned in the screenplay as one of the forces behind the papal plot.

There are also a number of striking similarities between the script and a host of unsavory characters connected with the real-life Vatican Bank scandal.

The bank, officially known as the Institute for Religious Work, was linked by Italian investigators to the 1982 collapse of Italy's private Banco Ambrosiano, which left \$ 1.2 billion in debts.

In 1987, an arrest warrant was issued for Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, the tough-talking prelate from Cicero, Ill., who headed the Vatican Bank. Marcinkus, who has also served as Pope John Paul II's bodyguard, escaped arrest by remaining within the Vatican until an Italian court quashed the warrant the next year.

EXPENSIVE GESTURE

While the Vatican denied any responsibility for the bank scandal, it paid \$ 250 million to Ambrosiano creditors in a ''goodwill gesture.''

Roberto Calvi, the president of Banco Ambrosiano, was found hanged under Blackfriars Bridge in London in June 1982. His still-disputed death was officially ruled to be a suicide in England.

Calvi's family charged that he was murdered to stop him from making disclosures that could embarrass the Vatican and international financiers. Last year, Italian judges considering a civil suit by the Calvi family agreed that the bank president was probably murdered.

In the Coppola-Puzo screenplay, one of the shadowy financiers involved with the Godfather is shown hanging from a bridge, but that scene appears to take place in Rome. And like Calvi, a character in ''Godfather III'' earns the nickname ''God's Banker.''

In an apparently separate case, another shadowy financier with Vatican Bank connections, Michele Sindona, was found dead in an Italian jail cell in 1986, the day after he was convicted of ordering the murder of a man who liquidated his bank. He had been poisoned, and as in the case of Roberto Calvi, opinions vary as to whether his death was murder or suicide.

Sindona was convicted of hiring Joseph Arico, an alleged organized crime assassin, to commit the murder. Arico later died after falling 40 feet while trying to escape from a New York City prison.

FRAUD CONVICTION

Sindona, a dapper Sicilian, was a financial adviser to Archbishop Marcinkus in the early 1970s. Sindona was convicted of fraud by a New York court in 1980 for his part in the 1974 collapse of Franklin National Bank, at the time the largest bank failure in U.S. history.

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The Vatican Connection in 'Godfather 3' The San Francisco Chronicle DECEMBER 28,
1990, FRIDAY, FINAL EDITION

The Vatican Bank is believed to have lost millions through its interest in Banca Unione, which Sindona controlled and merged with Banca Private Finanziaria to create Banca Privata Italiana.

Sindona, once one of the richest men in Italy, was also convicted of fraud in the March 1985 collapse of Banca Privata, with losses of \$ 200 million.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, Raf Vallone as Lamberto, the Sicilian cardinal named Pope John Paul I in 'Godfather 3'

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May 9, 1990, Wednesday

SECTION: HOME NEWS

LENGTH: 320 words

HEADLINE: PAPAL AIDE MAGEE IS FAVOURITE TO TAKE OVER

BYLINE: Chris Parkin, Press Association

BODY:

A former personal secretary to three Popes was today emerging as the likely new leader of Ireland's 3,500,000 Roman Catholics, following last night's death of Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich during a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Bishop John Magee, 53, who has been at the Cloyne diocese in County Cork since 1987, is a confidante of Pope John Paul II. He first became a power in the Vatican when Pope Paul VI appointed the Newry, County Down-born cleric as his secretary in 1974. Bishop Magee retained the post on the succession of Pope John Paul I, and was kept on by the present Pontiff for nine years until moving back to Ireland at the request of the Pope. It is believed the Pope will take a close interest in the appointment and for that reason Bishop Magee will be strong favourite, although it could be some months before the new Cardinal is named. Church observers in Dublin believe that of all the prospective candidates for the position, Bishop Magee would most closely follow the well-established conservative ideals of Pope John Paul II. He acted as a papal envoy during efforts to end the 1981 hunger strike by prisoners at Northern Ireland's Maze jail. Other possible contenders include the Bishop of Derry, Dr Edward Daly, best known for his role during Londonderry's "Bloody Sunday" 18 years ago, when 13 people were shot dead by the Army after a protest march in the city. Then a parish priest, Dr Daly braved gunfire, carrying a white flag, to aid the dead and injured. Like Dr O Fiaich, he has spoken out frequently on the "national question" in Ireland. Also in the running will be the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Desmond Connell, the present co-Adjutor Bishop of Meath, Dr Michael Smith, and Bishop Brendan Commiskey, of the Ferns diocese. The most senior and respected Irish bishop, Dr Cahal Daly, 73, of Down and Connor, is expected to be ruled out of the running because of his age and health.

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

February 3, 1990 Saturday

LENGTH: 404 words

HEADLINE: Death by lack of love

BYLINE: JOHN MELADY; GAM

BODY:

REVIEW BY JOHN MELADY

The death, on Sept. 28, 1978, of Pope John Paul I in the papal apartments at the Vatican, was as controversial as that of John F. Kennedy 15 years earlier. Both passings were unexpected, untimely, and almost immediately overshadowed by rumors of conspiracy. Both spawned a glut of media outpourings, many purporting to tell "the whole story." A Thief In The Night is superior to anything else, but it also fails to clear the air.

John Cornwell, former editor of the Foreign News Service of the London Observer, was invited by the Vatican to conduct a new investigation into the circumstances of Papa Luciani's death, and the allegations that he was poisoned in an assassination plot involving senior prelates of the Roman Catholic Church. Because he was encouraged by the present pope himself, Cornwell had access to almost everyone connected with the matter, including the affable papal banker Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, the private secretaries to the late pontiff, the senior FBI agent who conducted extensive investigations in Italy and even the morticians who helped prepare the body. But ultimately, Cornwell had to rely on his own hypothesis for what happened when the pontiff retired to bed at the end of his last day on earth.

Despite the refusal of three of those closest to the controversy to be completely candid, Cornwell's conclusions are fairly startling. He faults the clerical secretaries and a papal physician for shading the truth in spots, for ecclesiastical hair-splitting with regard to personal blame, for their essential lack of true Christian charity and for their failure to see what was before their eyes. Father John Magee, now a bishop in Southern Ireland, knew the pope was terribly unwell, yet failed to summon a doctor to treat the man he served. According to Cornwell, no doctor saw John Paul I during his brief 33-day pontificate, yet several of those closest to him knew the pope was ill, that his feet were sometimes swollen to the point that he could not wear shoes, that he suffered severe chest pains, and that he prayed daily for death.

Cornwell says the pope died from pulmonary embolism; that there was no conspiracy, but that there was an almost unbelievable lack of love for the

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Death by lack of love The Globe and Mail (Canada) February 3, 1990 Saturday

Vicar of Christ when he needed it most. There are still some questions, but this book comes as close as we will probably come to knowing the answers.

John Melady is a former columnist for the Catholic Register.

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The Washington Times

November 23, 1989, Thursday, Final Edition

SECTION: Part F; COMMENTARY; BOOK REVIEW; Pg. F4

LENGTH: 897 words

HEADLINE: Not by the hand of conspirators

BYLINE: George Weigel; THE WASHINGTON TIMES

BODY:

Shortly after John Paul I, the "smiling pope," died suddenly after a pontificate of only 33 days, rumors of skulduggery began to swirl around the papal catafalque.

Some saw the sinister hand of the KGB, intent on discrediting the Vatican, in the rumors. Others charged that there was more to the matter, and that the "more" involved alleged financial machinations by the Vatican Bank and its American boss, Archbishop Paul Marcinkus - a native of Cicero, Ill., where, the paparazzi loved to remind us, Al Capone was once a prominent citizen.

According to these conspiracy theorists, John Paul had to be disposed of because he was about to blow the whistle on an unholy combine comprised of Mr. Marcinkus, the Mafia and the murky Italian Masonic lodge, P2, aided and abetted by the cardinal secretary of state, Jean Villot, and the sinister archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal John Cody.

Bizarre as all this sounds, the revised standard version of the conspiracy theory, David Yallop's 1984 book "In God's Name," sold briskly throughout Europe and in the United States - more briskly, in fact, than books which explored the far more credible suspicion of KGB involvement in the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II.

"A Thief in the Night: The Mysterious Death of Pope John Paul I," should, although it probably won't, put an end to the more lurid speculations about the death of Papa Luciani. John Cornwell is an investigative reporter of international repute, and former foreign editor of the London Observer. A one-time seminarian, although now a self-described "lapsed Catholic for more than 20 years," Mr. Cornwell's summary judgment will disappoint the more fevered of the conspiracy theorists.

After exhaustive interviews with most of the principals in the drama (Cardinal Villot died before Mr. Cornwell began his work), the author concludes that David Yallop was simply, flatly wrong. There was no Marcinkus/Mafia/P2/Villot/Cody conspiracy to murder John Paul I. Rather, according to Mr. Cornwell, the pope was the victim of the electoral process which put him into St. Peter's Chair, and was ill-served by the bureaucracy

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Not by the hand of conspirators The Washington Times November 23, 1989,
Thursday, Final Edition

whose purported purpose was to do his will.

Mr. Cornwell's Albino Luciani was a man in bad health, poorly equipped by temperament and past experience for the crushing administrative burden of the papacy, and surrounded by a staff that failed to take adequate account of his physical fragility and mental distress.

Mocked by Vatican old-timers as a faintly amusing ignoramus, and burdened by a profound sense of his own inadequacy, Papa Luciani seemed to sense that his papacy would be a short one and constantly referred to "The Foreigner" who would succeed him. When his last physical crisis came, the Vatican's doctors had yet to examine him thoroughly, nor had his medical records been sent to Rome from Venice, where he had previously served as cardinal patriarch.

In short, an electoral process which chose a non-threatening but gravely incapacitated pontiff, and a bureaucracy too stuck in its own ritualized grooves to meet Albino Luciani's very human needs, caused the untimely death of John Paul I. No conspiracy, then; but no great credit to the cardinal-electors or the Vatican staff, either.

Readers without ecclesiastical or political axes to grind may well leave "A Thief in the Night" more satisfied with John Cornwell's demolition of the Yallop proposition, than with the author's reconstruction of the brief papacy of John Paul I and the portrait of the Vatican bureaucracy. No doubt the Holy See has its self-serving yes-men, its sycophants, its nasty characters. The church is, after all, and by its own frank admission, an "earthen vessel" carrying a message of transcendent worth.

But Mr. Cornwell's relentless depiction of senior Vatican officials (with the interesting exception of Archbishop Marcinkus) as venal, mean-spirited, grossly ambitious and largely lacking in human sympathy, seems a bit overdrawn.

Mr. Cornwell also seems a little unfair to John Paul I. Albino Luciani was not, and did not pretend to be, the kind of seasoned church administrator he succeeded, nor did he aspire to be the kind of protean figure who succeeded him. But it should not be forgotten that Albino Luciani, by his accessibility, his palpable goodness and his rejection of a monarchial investiture ceremony set, in just over a month, the model of the contemporary papacy that John Paul II has used to such effect. A pope who was tough enough to decline the tiara, and to enforce his decision on what one can assume was a reluctant staff, was surely not the milquetoast portrayed by John Cornwell.

Mr. Cornwell's concern for the often-Byzantine functioning of the Vatican is not entirely misplaced. But, welcome as his solid refutation of the conspiracy theorists is, his book would have done an even greater service had it given us a rounded, rather than skewed, picture of the pattern of relationships, tensions, hopes and fears of life at the senior bureaucratic levels of the world's oldest institution.

George Weigel, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, is the author of "Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy."

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT:

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH

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Not by the hand of conspirators The Washington Times November 23, 1989,
Thursday, Final Edition

OF POPE JOHN PAUL I

By John Cornwell

Simon & Schuster

366 pages, \$21.95

GRAPHIC: Photo, Pope John Paul I

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The Times (London)

August 11 1989, Friday

SECTION: Issue 63470.

LENGTH: 635 words

HEADLINE: Times Diary

BYLINE: ROBIN YOUNG

BODY:

Catholic theologians are usually concerned with mysteries more profound than mere murder, but a recently published book by the Swiss cardinal-designate, Hans Urs von Balthasar, who died last year, gives posthumous support to the idea that John Paul I, the smiling Pope, was poisoned.

The book recounts the 'revelations' of one of Balthasar's disciples, Sister Erika Holzach. On the night that John Paul I died she had a vision of the papal apartments 'and saw two men enter the Pope's bedroom. One carried the lethal injection, the other kept watch.' Balthasar took this so seriously he insisted that Pope John Paul II should be told about it. John Paul II subsequently nominated Balthasar as a cardinal. He died before he could take office but then, after all, he was over 80.

According to Don Sharp, 'nobody stuffs like an Englishman'. He is founder of the Guild of Taxidermists, and he hopes our national representatives will prove the claim at the guild's annual conference in York when they take on more than 100 taxidermists from all over the world in a 'stuff a hedgehog' competition. Hedgehogs, Sharp explains, so frequently have the stuffing knocked out of them on our roads that most serious taxidermists always have three or four in their freezer to practise on.

Does anyone remember the Clanricarde Gardens fire? The horrific blaze, in 1981, burnt out a block of bedsit flats in Notting Hill, west London. It killed eight people, left 100 homeless, and touched off a nationwide campaign on behalf of tenants in overcrowded and dangerous houses. North Kensington Law Centre has just succeeded, eight years after the event, in winning a Pounds 35,000 damages settlement for the survivors. It is little more than half the amount claimed, and still sets no precedent because, after all that time, the matter was settled out of court. But it is the first time any landlord has been forced to accept responsibility for providing adequate fire precautions and means of escape.

The Action Group Against Interceptory Netting for Salmon and Sea-trout (Against, for short) claims to have caught English drift-netters in a neat snare. Most countries, including Scotland, have banned drift-netting, which depletes stocks, damages fish and leaves the sea full of discarded nylon netting

Times Diary The Times (London) August 11 1989, Friday

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which wreaks havoc with wildlife. Against has calculated from official returns that the average net income of licensed drift-netters in the Northumbrian Water Authority area is about Pounds 2,650 a year. Either, it argues, the fishery does not provide a significant part of the coastal fishermen's income, or the declared catches are substantially false.

There is a certain chutzpah about the name which the waste disposal firm, Rechem, has chosen for its new landfill division. It is Terramicus which, roughly translated from dog Latin, means 'friends of the earth'.

The property recession seems to be biting with especial savagery in Dulwich, where the Thatchers have invested in their retirement home. Six Pillars, a Grade II listed house on the Dulwich College estate, on offer through Roy Brooks, has just been cut in price by a swingeing Pounds 100,000 to Pounds 365,000. The Le Corbusier-style house rates a mention in Pevsner as 'worth examining'. Few serious buyers in the present climate seem to have taken the hint.

There is a rather touching insight into the possibly unworldly nature of Dr Tim Lang, director of the London Food Commission and the man whom Mrs Teresa Gorman would blame for all our food scares, in a story told by the actress Pamela Stephenson. As a parent she has turned campaigner for safer food, and called together her showbiz friends Twiggy, Patricia Hodge and Anneka Rice for a meeting with Dr Lang. Afterwards he asked innocently: 'Who were those people?'

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Copyright 1989 Nationwide News Pty Limited
Hobart Mercury

June 24, 1989 Saturday

LENGTH: 894 words

BYLINE: PULLELLA PHILIP

BODY:

Last word on Vat ican whodunnit no murder but bur eaucratic neglect Pope John Paul I is invested with the pallium of the See of Rome, after his election on August 26, 1978. He declined the triple crown of his predecessors. Inset: John Paul I lies in state in the Sala Clementina on October 3, 1978.

By PHILIP PULLELLA in Vatican City THE most sought-after book inside the Vatican these days is not a new papal encyclical nor a controversial theological treatise.

It is a work which seeks to quash the tireless rumour that Pope John Paul I was murdered in 1978, but which paints the tiny, walled city-state as the domain of bungling bureaucrats and spiteful monsignors.

"Everybody here is talking about it, wanting to borrow a copy from someone," a Vatican insider said about A Thief in the Night, a new book by British journalist John Cornwell.

Cornwell systematically and methodically challenges the murder allegations made popular by a fellow Briton, David Yallop, in his 1984 international bestseller, In God's Name.

Yallop claimed that a number of people in the Vatican had a motive for poisoning the newly elected Albino Luciani because of institutional changes he intended to make.

Known because of his good nature, as the "smiling Pope", Luciani reigned for only 33 days from August 26 until he died on September 28, 1978. The official cause of death was given as a heart attack.

Although Yallop's research methods were criticised by other journalists and his allegations hotly denied by the Vatican, his book has been a thorn in the side of the Roman Catholic Church.

American priests visiting Rome told Vatican officials they did not know how to handle questions from their parishioners, such as: "Father, why was the smiling Pope poisoned?" Cornwell, a 48-year-old former Roman Catholic seminarian, novelist and former journalist on the London Observer, was given unprecedented access to Vatican officials.

Some of them, such as papal doctor Renato Buzzonetti and Irish Archbishop John Magee, one of Pope Luciani's two private secretaries, spoke to Cornwell only after being told that the current Pope wanted them to.

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Cornwell concludes that Pope John Paul I died from a pulmonary embolism resulting from his long-standing blood-circulation problems.

Although it clashes with the official cause of death, this conclusion is supported in the book by the current Vatican spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, and the late Pope's niece, Lina Petri, who both studied medicine.

But if the Vatican sought in Cornwell a white knight to kill all the rumours, they did not find one.

Cornwell in effect accuses the institution and its bureaucratic, Byzantine ways of neglecting the Pope's health and of causing widespread confusion by the way the news of his death was given to the world.

He says the Pope's medical records were not brought to Rome from Venice, where he had been cardinal, and that Vatican doctors had never examined him.

Despite severe chest and leg pains, and badly swollen feet suffered by the Pope the day before he died, his secretaries did not inform the doctors, according to the book.

They said the pontiff refused suggestions for a doctor to be called.

The Pope's body was found by a nun who entered his room at dawn after he failed to take the coffee she left outside and did not respond to knocking on the door. She then called Magee, one of his secretaries.

The Vatican, not comfortable with the idea that a woman, albeit an elderly nun, had been in the Pope's bedroom, said in the official version that Magee had found the body.

The book also highlights the rivalry in the abrasive relationship between Magee, an Irish Vatican veteran, and the Pope's other secretary, Italian newcomer monsignor Diego Lorenzi.

Magee and Lorenzi still disagree on whether both of them were in the Vatican the night before the Pope died.

Cornwell also documents how some reporting by Italian journalists fuelled the mystery.

Poison theorists attributed great importance to conflicting statements on what the Pope was reading in bed when he died. Various versions said it was a speech announcing a crackdown on the Jesuits, a plan for reshuffling Vatican posts, and a copy of Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*.

Cornwell shows how the rumour that the Pope was reading Thomas a Kempis began in the Vatican press room, but got so out of control that even Vatican radio broadcast it as fact, correcting it later.

The author also shows how an Italian news agency erroneously reported - but never corrected - a story that Rome morticians were summoned an hour before the time the Vatican said the Pope's body had been discovered.

Cornwell also gives a unique insight into the daily life of people who live and work in the Vatican.

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US Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, whose typical American bluntness has not endeared him to some Vatican officials, told him: "This is a village, excuse me if I say this, a village of washerwomen." Andrew Greely, a US priest and bestselling author, said Cornwell portrayed the Vatican as it really was: "bumbling, venal, paranoid, arrogant, frightened, ignorant, petty, inept".

Vatican officials have reacted quietly to the book, accusing Cornwell of excessive gossip. But as one insider said, "Whatever his criticisms, it's better to be portrayed as incompetents than as conspiratorial murderers".

GRAPHIC: 1) Pope John Paul I is invested with the pallium of the See of Rome, after his election on August 26, 1978. He declined the triple crown of his predecessors. 2) Inset: John Paul I lies in state in the Sala Clementina on October 3, 1978. 920PTE

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Manchester Guardian Weekly

June 18, 1989

SECTION: BOOKS; Pg. 29

LENGTH: 881 words

HEADLINE: Death at the Vatican;
A THIEF IN THE NIGHT: THE DEATH OF POPE JOHN PAUL I, by John Cornwell (Viking £14.95) **THE SECRET WORLD OF OPUS DEI,** by Michael Walsh (Grafton £14.95)

BYLINE: By Brian Dooley

BODY:

THAT there was a cover-up over the death of Pope John Paul I is not in doubt. The Vatican has admitted that it was "less than frank" about the circumstances of his death, and says it lied to the world because the truth was embarrassing.

John Paul, it seems, was not discovered dead by a priest, as the Vatican claimed for years, but -- horror of horrors -- by Sister Vincenza, an elderly nun who brought him coffee at dawn. Top officials believed this revelation -- that the first person to see the papal pyjamas every morning was a woman -- was too much for 850 million Catholics to bear, and so lied.

The cover-up led many to believe that Pope John Paul I -- Albino Luciani to his friends -- had in fact been murdered from inside the Vatican. Alarmed at the popularity of this allegation, an archbishop in Rome offered to "open the Vatican" to John Cornwell on the understanding that he would put the record straight and end the rumours.

Unfortunately for the archbishop, Cornwell's exhaustive and impressive study concludes that the Pope was killed. He claims that the pontiff died "from neglect and a lack of love". Cornwell convincingly suggests that Albino Luciani was not up to the job, that soon after his election he and many of his staff realised it, so when he complained of illness and severe chest pains no one did much about it, and he was left to die.

"He died alone at the very heart of the Christian community. He died without the last rites," alleges Cornwell, who was given unprecedented access to records and personnel in the Vatican. Cornwell makes an impressive sleuth, even if he does fancy himself as a bit of a Raymond Chandler, chatting up archbishops' secretaires ("she looked at me appraisingly, with doleful eyes") and teasing tidbits from people who should know better.

Nevertheless, his investigations reveal a lot about the cut-throat atmosphere of the place: the double-crossing, the misinformation, the general bitchiness of power-hungry priests. The simple luciani was just not sophisticated enough to deal with it.

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Death at the Vatican; A THIEF IN THE NIGHT: THE DEATH OF POPE JOHN PAUL I, by John Cornwell (Viking £14.95) THE SECRET WORLD OF OPUS DEI, by Michael Walsh (Grafton £14.95) Manchester Guardian Weekly Ju

"The new Pope was scorned for his waddling walk, his ungainly appearance . . . His naive discourses -- described by one cleric as 'a Readers' Digest mentality' . . . Members of the Curia disparaged his simple language, his habit of mentioning Pinocchio in the same breath as Augustine and Gregory the Great . . . there were endless stories of his gaucheries and faux pas, some of them apocryphal, like his popping his head out of the Sant' Anna Gate to look at the traffic, some of them true, like the dropping of his documents from the roof garden."

Many thought he was a "pretend Pope", that he looked like Peter Sellers. Despite his great popularity among ordinary Catholics, he seems to have been detested in the Vatican. Against this background it is quite possible that he was allowed to die; his election had been a mistake, they thought, the Church would be better off without him.

No less alarming are the claims made by Michael Walsh in his investigation of Opus Dei, the Catholic organisation many believe is a sinister cult akin to the Moonies.

Former members reveal what goes on inside the Opus houses (to be found in Oxford, Bayswater, Chelsea, Manchester and hundreds of other places around the world). Young girls in the organisation are encouraged to take cold showers, wear a spiked bracelet around their thighs for two hours a day and apply "a rope whip to their buttocks once a week". This is no joke. Opus Dei has been granted a personal prelature by the present Pope, which in effect means it is an independent organisation within the Church answerable only to the pontiff himself.

Despite years of allegations accusing Opus Dei of neo-fascism and anti-left subversive activities in South America, the movement continues to flourish, with an estimated 300-400 members in England. They live by 999 maxims set down by their Spanish founder, Monsignor Josemaria Escriva, a man with a predilection for gold cockery and model donkeys.

These maxims declare -- "Books: Don't buy them without advice from a Christian who is learned or prudent. It is easy to buy something useless or harmful," and "To be 'Catholic' means to love your country and to be second to none in the love." There are handy tips for women, who "needn't be scholars; it is enough for them to be prudent". There are even supposed to be guidelines on how many pairs of underpants a member is allowed to possess.

Opus Dei is not so funny for the parents who believe their children have been "lost" to the sect. Anxiety over its activities led Cardinal Hume to lay down guidelines for the organisation in Westminster, forbidding it to allow anyone under 18 to make a long-term commitment. Recruitment among the young still goes on, however, even though new members are only allowed to visit their parents once or twice a year.

Since it was founded in the early 1930s Opus Dei has been regarded with a healthy suspicion by the rest of the Catholic church, especially by the Jesuits. For reasons best known to himself, Pope John Paul II has upgraded its official position with the personal prelature status, and moves are underway to have Escriva sainted. Many Catholics will think it another scandal if he is.

GRAPHIC: Picture, Collage by Graham Rawle

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The Guardian (London)

June 2, 1989

LENGTH: 889 words

HEADLINE: Books: Death at the Vatican / Review of 'A Thief In The Night: The Death Of Pope John Paul I' By John Cornwell and 'The Secret World Of Opus Dei' By Michael Walsh

BYLINE: By BRIAN DOOLEY

BODY:

A Thief In The Night: The Death Of Pope John Paul I, by John Cornwell (Viking Pounds 14.95)

The Secret World Of Opus Dei, by Michael Walsh (Grafton Pounds 14.95)

That there was a cover-up over the death of Pope John Paul I is not in doubt. The Vatican has admitted that it was embarrassing.

John Paul, it seems, was not discovered dead by a priest, as the Vatican claimed for years but - horror of horrors - by Sister Vincenza, an elderly nun who brought him coffee at dawn. Top officials believed this revelation - that the first person to see the papal pyjamas every morning was a woman - was too much for 850 million Catholics to bear, and so lied.

The cover-up led many to believe that Pope John Paul I - Albino Luciani to his friends - had in fact been murdered from inside the Vatican. Alarmed at the popularity of this allegation, an archbishop in Rome offered to 'open up the Vatican' to John Cornwell on the understanding that he would put the record straight and end the rumours.

Unfortunately for the archbishop, Cornwell's exhaustive and impressive study concludes that the Pope was killed. He claims that the pontiff died 'from neglect and a lack of love'. Cornwell convincingly suggests that Albino Luciani was not up to the job, that soon after his election he and many of his staff realised it, so when he complained of illness and severe chest pains no one did much about it, and he was left to die.

'He died alone at the very heart of the Christian community. He died without the last rites,' alleges Cornwell, who was given unprecedented access to records and personnel in the Vatican. Cornwell makes an impressive sleuth, even if he does fancy himself as a bit of a Raymond Chandler, chatting up archbishops' secretaries ('she looked at me appraisingly, with doleful eyes') and teasing titbits from people who should know better.

Nevertheless, his investigations reveal a lot about the cut-throat atmosphere of the place: the double-crossing, the misinformation, the general

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Books: Death at the Vatican / Review of 'A Thief In The Night: The Death Of Pope John Paul I' By John Cornwell and 'The Secret World Of Opus Dei' By Michael Walsh The Guardian (Lon

bitchiness of power-hungry priests. The simple Luciani was just not sophisticated enough to deal with it.

'The new Pope was scorned for his waddling walk, his ungainly appearance .. His naive discourses - described by one cleric as 'a Reader's Digest mentality' .. Members of the Curia disparaged his simple language, his habit of mentioning Pinocchio in the same breath as Augustine and Gregory the Great .. there were endless stories of his gaucheries and faux pas, some of them apocryphal, like his popping his head out of the Sant' Anna Gate to look at the traffic, some of them true, like the dropping of his documents from the roof garden.'

Many thought he was a 'pretend Pope', that he looked like Peter Sellers. Despite his great popularity among ordinary Catholics, he seems to have been detested in the Vatican. Against his background it is quite possible that he was allowed to die; his election had been a mistake, they thought, the church would be better off without him.

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Books: Death at the Vatican / Review of 'A Thief In The Night: The Death Of Pope John Paul I' By John Cornwell and 'The Secret World Of Opus Dei' By Michael Walsh The Guardian (Lon) Page 50

LOAD-DATE: June 13, 2000

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The Independent

June 1 1989, Thursday

SECTION: Leader ; Pg. 22

LENGTH: 718 words

HEADLINE: BOOK REVIEW / The burden of faith: 'A Thief in the Night' - John Cornwell: Viking, 14.95 pounds

BYLINE: PETER STANFORD

BODY:

THE 'smiling Pope', John Paul I, was not the type to command headlines. Before his unexpected election as leader of the Catholic Church, he had passed his days in the tranquil backwater of Venice, writing fictional letters between Pinocchio and the scholars of the early Christian church, or cycling around the outlying areas of his diocese in mufti. Neither outstanding theologian nor 'political' prelate in the manner of his more outgoing fellow Italians, the most remarkable thing about Albino Luciani before 1978 was that he had risen as high as Patriarch of Venice.

His 33-day reign in the Vatican, however, has made him one of the most controversial figures in the history of the Church. Speculation has centred not so much on what he achieved, or failed to achieve, as on the manner of his death. Was this simple prelate, as several 'investigative' writers have alleged, the victim of an elaborate murder plot hatched and executed by senior Vatican clerics fearful for their continued influence? Or was Papa Luciani out of his depth in the Holy See, killed by the strain of heading a multinational organisation?

In *A Thief in the Night*, John Cornwell, himself a former seminarian, attempts to unravel the mystery once and for all. Assisted by a new generation of media-conscious Vatican administrators, and apparently with the backing of John Paul II himself, Mr Cornwell directs a court-room drama in the best tradition of Perry Mason. Key witnesses - secretaries, guards, doctors, bishops, cardinals - take the stand and tell their stories. Experts are called to corroborate forensic evidence. Lastly, in his summing up, the author presents for the jury, his readers, a theory of the death which is consistent with all the facts that he has painstakingly uncovered.

But in the final analysis Mr Cornwell is defeated by the evidence he presents. His bland suggestion is that John Paul I died suddenly and painlessly of a pulmonary embolus - a blockage in the blood vessels around the lungs. In the language of the courtroom, natural causes. Rather a disappointing conclusion after almost 300 pages of testimony.

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BOOK REVIEW / The burden of faith: 'A Thief in the Night' - John Cornwell:
Viking, 14.95 pounds The Independent June 1 1989, Thursday

The Vatican machine and its faceless operators are thus absolved of murder, a charge made by David Yallop in his sensational and threadbare expose In God's Name. The equation that Mr Yallop made between being a poor and even corrupt clerical bureaucrat and being a murderer is replaced in Mr Cornwell's text by the charge that Papa Luciani was driven to death by a job that was way beyond him, while Christian men stood by and didn't lift a finger to save him.

If the Roman administrators are conclusively cleared of homicide by Mr Cornwell, they are condemned on other accounts. 'The Vatican is a court, a palace of gossipy eunuchs. The whole place floats on a sea of brilliant bitchery', an English cleric, referred to as Mgr Sottovoce, tells the author over a lavish Roman lunch. Paul Marcinkus, the American archbishop in charge of the Vatican Bank and until now widely regarded as (at the very least) a crooked financier, after a series of dubious business deals, describes the nerve-centre of the Catholic Church, with the resignation of a long-term victim, as 'a village of washerwomen - they get down in the river, wash clothes, punch 'em, dance on 'em, squeezing all the old dirt out'. Far from being a potential assassin, Marcinkus emerges from this book as a victim to rank alongside John Paul I. Both were ill-equipped to deal with the secretive world into which they were catapulted.

One can only hope that John Paul II is fighting the good fight rather more successfully than his predecessor. Perhaps there are lessons to be learnt from Papa Luciani's tragic demise. Almost alone of multinationals, the Catholic Church insists on promoting its top officials at an age when everyone else is retiring them. (Authoritarian dictatorships being the other notable exception).

My abiding picture of John Paul I, after reading this book, will be that of an imprisoned man anxiously pacing a concrete terrace above the papal apartments, reading state documents. A breeze blows them out of his hands, scattering them in the square below. The Pope's reaction is to burst into tears and take to his bed, where he curls up and sobs.

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

May 20, 1989 Saturday
Late Edition

SECTION: SPECTRUM; Reviews; Pg. 82

LENGTH: 1612 words

HEADLINE: THE POPE DESPISED AND REJECTED;
BOOKS AND WRITERS

BYLINE: MORRIS WEST

BODY:

THIS IS the latest and, I believe, the most trustworthy account of the death of Pope John Paul I on September 1, 1978, and the allegations of conspiracy and murder which became current immediately after that event. I make this judgment with reasonable confidence, because I knew, personally, a number of the characters involved and was connected, by a chain of curious circumstances, to the events themselves.

On the day Pope John Paul I died, I was in Palm Beach Florida, working on my second novel on the Papacy, The Clowns of God. I flew immediately to Rome to be present at the Papal obsequies, the events of the sede vacante period and the early preparations for the conclave. Through my old friend, the late Peter Nichols, I plugged into the news network. Vatican contacts long in place supplied the rest of the information.

The city was buzzing with rumour of foul play, but the Romans live on rumour and I had long since learned to discount it. The wiser heads of the press corps - Nichols among them - judged, quite rightly as it turned out, that the Vatican had bungled its public relations, been less than truthful about the circumstances of the Pontiff's death, and had been trapped between the upper and nether millstones: Roman scandalmongering and political disinformation.

The public relations exercise had begun to go wrong immediately after the election of the Pontiff. Nobody could really explain how or why he had been elected except as a blocking measure to exclude Cardinals Benelli and Siri. John Paul I was, by all accounts, a devoted pastor, a man of singular simplicity and charm, but ill equipped for the exercise of papal power. In all the reporting of the period he presents a curious soft-focus image. The electors themselves - those who were prepared to be quoted - tended to fall back on such cliches as "a pastoral pope" and "the presence of the Holy Spirit in the conclave". His writings, much quoted, seemed rather the diversions of an elderly prelate than the pronouncement of a vigorous mind. I remember thinking, as I moved in the long file of Romans past the catafalque, that even his lying-in-state lacked the customary grandeur, that it was very hot and they wouldn't dare keep his body

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exposed too long ...

Cut now to London in 1982. The London publishers, Jonathan Cape, were offering to the American market a manuscript entitled *In God's Name*, by David Yallop. This purported to be a documentary account of the murder of John Paul I at the instigation of a group of conspirators which included Cardinal Villot, the Camerlengo, Archbishop Cody of Chicago and Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, head of the Institute of Works of Religion, the Vatican Bank.

Cape, sure it had a hot property, had devised an ingenious hype to sell the US and foreign rights. The manuscript would not be circulated. It could only be read in their London office. My New York publisher, Lawrence Hughes of William Morrow & Co, asked me to deputise for him, read the manuscript and make a recommendation to purchase or pass. I pointed out that this put me in a very awkward position. If I recommended purchase and the book turned out to be a lemon, what then? Worse, what if I recommended a pass and the book became a bestseller? His answer was definite: you're the expert, we'll back your judgment.

I read the manuscript. Much of the material and many of the personages were known to me. Marcinkus had been an occasional visitor to my house. His then golfing buddy was an old friend of mine, the late George Seabury, who handled public relations for Pan-Am in Rome. Some of the secular characters I had already investigated while I was writing *The Salamander*.

Yallop had been industrious in assembling facts about the banking scandals in which Archbishop Marcinkus had been involved. He had been ingenious in positing motives for a criminal conspiracy. He had, however, gone far beyond the rules of legitimate deduction when he stated categorically, as he did in the first edition of the book, "... And so, murder was done |" I note that that sentence, but not the conclusion, has been changed in later editions.

My report to my publishers was as follows: If Marcinkus decided, and were permitted, to sue, then publisher and author would be wide open to a huge defamation suit; also, if I were a publisher, I wouldn't want to handle a documentary that was as tainted by pure speculation as this one. This being said, I believed the book could be a *succes de scandale* and make a lot of money. As it happened, Marcinkus did not sue. Morrow declined the book and missed a bestseller.

Which brings us to 1984, when I appeared in Sydney with Yallop himself on the Mike Walsh Show. I repeated publicly in substance and in some detail the criticisms I had voiced to my publisher. The tape of the program shows that I challenged Yallop - who, be it said, is a very agreeable man - with his categorical statement that murder was done. At first he denied it, then, faced with the evidence of the text, recanted the denial. Later he admitted that he had been under considerable editorial pressure to "colour" the story as dramatically as possible ...

All of which is by way of a backhanded compliment to John Cornell's reportage in *A Thief in the Night*. Yallop fell into the trap of reconstructing dialogue and most of his dialogues were pure fiction. Cornell's dialogues were transcribed from tapes which he made at each interview. His descriptions of Vatican personalities - Archbishop John Foley, President of the Commission for Social Communications, of Archbishop Marcinkus, Monsignor Kennedy of the English College - all tally with fact.

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His geography is accurate. Above all, his understanding of Vatican atmosphere - those dreary anterooms where visitors await the arrival of clerical functionaries, the practised evasions and circumlocutions, the whole dialect of this celibate monarchy - is firm and sure.

Cornell's method was also entirely acceptable. He recorded depositions from all the characters who were willing to talk to him. He compared the information they delivered. He indicated the direction in which he was inevitably led. He left the reader free to confirm or deny his conclusions. Yallop began with an hypothesis and arranged the evidence to prove it. Cornell - with much more stylistic grace, by the way | - embarked on an investigation with the tools and the habits of a working journalist. His performance was by far the more creditable and reputable.

I have no intention of spoiling the reader's own pleasures of discovery by rehashing Cornell's narrative. An author's work is his own, and it will not easily survive a hasty digest. However, there is one point which needs to be made. John Cornell is, by his own admission, an ex-Catholic, a former seminarian. He confessed freely that "the writing of this book has been something of a sentimental journey - an unusual opportunity to review my attitude toward the practices and beliefs of Catholicism and the practices and attitudes of the Roman Catholic clergy

at the very centre of the Church".

Given this confession, one might be forgiven a certain scepticism about the unconscious colouration of the narrative. However, the scepticism was quickly allayed by the affirmation:

No conditions were imposed on my research, nor on my on my conclusions. My interviews with official representatives and principal witnesses were taped and attributable. There were obstacles and obstructiveness in plenty, but these arose because of individual reluctance rather than official policy; there are people within the Vatican, after all, with minds and wills of their own.

It was not long before I realised that the process of my investigation would be as important as my findings; that I had been granted a privileged insight into the workings, the personalities and the behaviour of priests and prelates in one of the most secretive institutions in the world. My story inevitably embraced the tensions that exist between a high spiritual calling and the demands of bureaucracy, worldly ambition, politics and mammon at the administrative heart of the Roman Catholic Church."

You must remember that I lived and worked for upwards of seven years in Rome and ran a largish Roman household, where the response to any embarrassing question was a shrug, a roll of the eyes and an expressive "Boh |" - which generally meant "Why should I know? And why would I tell you anyway?" In other words, despite the assurances of open access, Cornell did not get an easy ride from his witnesses - and he did not always get the truth.

So, my endorsement of the book and my praise for the author's performance are given freely and without reservation. His conclusion is the most rational and the most likely that has yet been presented:

"John Paul almost certainly died of a pulmonary embolus due to a condition of abnormal coagulability of the blood. He required rest and monitored medication.

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(Australia) May 20, 1989 Saturday

If these had been prescribed he would almost certainly have survived. The warnings of a mortal illness were clear for all to see; the signs were ignored . . ."

"The whisperings, the rumours, the theories - far-fetched, sensational, fantastic - all serve a purpose: they detract from the most obvious and shameful fact of all: that John Paul I died scorned and neglected by the institution that existed to sustain him."

The indictment is harsh; but the evidence in support is strong.

One of the less appealing aspects of bachelor communities, be they religious or secular, is that their members very easily become self-centred, selfprotective and sadly deficient in compassion. The larger and more powerful the community, the more visible are its defects.

GRAPHIC: Drawing: By Ward O'Neill

LOAD-DATE: July 20, 2007

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

May 17, 1989 Wednesday
Late Edition

SECTION: NEWS AND FEATURES; Pg. 12

LENGTH: 1342 words

HEADLINE: THE SCORNED POPE WHO LONGED TO DIE

BYLINE: JOHN CORNWELL

BODY:

The whisperings, the rumours, the theories about murder - far-fetched, sensational, fantastic - all serve a purpose; they detract from the most obvious and shameful fact of all.

When Cardinal Albino Luciani, Patriarch of Venice, was elected Pope at the age of 65, he won enormous popular affection. One commentator said he was thought of as even more popular than John XXIII; he was even holier, more humble, more modest, more simple.

The corporate verdict in the Vatican, however, was a good deal less charitable.

The new Pope was scorned for his waddling walk, his ungainly appearance, his askew zucchetto (skull cap), his naive discourses - described by one cleric as a "Reader's Digest mentality". They mocked his attempts to speak to the masses, all those homespun homilies addressed to children. They wagged their heads and imitated his piping voice saying: "There's more of Mama than of Papa in almighty God." Members of the Curia disparaged his simple language, his habit of mentioning Pinocchio in the same breath as Augustine and Gregory the Great. He was a pretend-Pope, like "Peter Sellers", a clown. There were endless stories of his gaucheries and faux pas, some of them apocryphal.

The verdict of one Vatican official commenting on his death is typical of many that I heard: "The Holy Spirit did a good job: relieving us of him before he did too much damage."

There is ample evidence that John Paul believed from the very outset that his election had been a mistake and that his Papacy was doomed. He longed to die; he prayed and begged God to die; and he was convinced that it would not be long before his wish was granted.

John Paul I had managed to rise in the Church while avoiding the grind of bureaucracy and financial responsibility. He had been sheltered from political conflict and had no time for theological dispute. His path to a Bishopric had

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been in the enclosed world of a seminary where he taught general subjects. His special expertise had been catechetics - the communication of Christian doctrine in clear and simple formulas.

He replaced his secretary in Venice because he could not abide conversations about the state of the world and Church politics. He was suspicious of theology, which he thought could lead to heresy.

He loved the simple freedoms of his routine life: the ability to walk out and mix among the people, the freedom to take his siesta, to take vacations walking in the mountains, to spend time with his own family. As his secretary, Father John Magee, remarked: "He was a man who worried about small, little things."

His constant sustenance was the Imitation of Christ, a work of spirituality that emphasises asceticism and personal piety. Aimed at the spiritual formation of monks and nuns in enclosed communities, it is uncompromising in its rejection of the 'vanities' of this world.

When he took over the Patriarchate of Venice he had clearly arrived at an extraordinary summit for his intellectual and administrative gifts, and he had achieved it without apparent ambition or desire for promotion. He had been chosen by general acclamation: a token of that periodic nostalgic longing in the Church for the simple, pietistic answers to the world's problems and evils.

The ancient Patriarchate, rich in history and pageantry, is probably less onerous an administrative chore than a large inner-city parish.

All this came to an abrupt end in August 1978, when he was elected Pope. Without seeking it, lobbying for it or even vaguely suspecting it, Luciani, at the age of 65, was placed in one of the world's most demanding executive hot-seats, with 3,000 Vatican employees at home, 3,000 Bishops abroad and the spiritual leadership

of nearly a billion souls. The burden of Papal office combines a huge weight of moral responsibility as well as the legacy of history - the oldest surviving autocratic institution on earth. The bureaucratic, political and financial ramifications of the modern Papacy are incalculable.

It was, perhaps with a sense of nostalgic longing, that the Conclave had decided on a pastoral choice: a holy man, a simple man, somebody who would short-circuit the wheeler-dealing of the Curia. Everything would be safe, they had decided, in the hands of a man of true prayer and saintliness.

It is apparent, from the vantage of hindsight, that Albino Luciani was singularly ill-equipped by experience and by nature for the role of Pontiff. It is equally clear that he was seriously ill.

Without compromising his personal approach, and despite his handicaps, John Paul nevertheless attempted to accommodate himself to the enormous burden: he rejected the pomp of the coronation; he asked to be called Pastor rather than Pontiff; he brought out his old sermons and polished them. He gave his winning smile before the cameras and did his best to behave in Rome as he had done throughout his priestly life.

But the public exterior was masking a private agony. For much of the day he was trapped, a prisoner in the "gilded" cage with his daily nightmare: the two

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suitcases of papers that came from Cardinal Jean Villot, the Secretary of State, and on "every sheet of paper a problem".

Villot's miscalculation of the Pope's administrative capacities, his poor state of health, was disastrous and surely culpable.

Villot was at him day and night; John Paul tried to walk in the Vatican Gardens, he was dogged by security men and Villot would hurry out to meet him and ply him with yet more problems. Night and day Villot appeared, pressing him for answers and solutions, nagging and goading.

We know that one priest, Father Don Pattaro, found the Pope completely "disoriented" in the last week of his life. And after John Paul's death, Villot would tell people that he believed that he had "destroyed" the Pope with pressure of work.

The Papal valets were, according to Magee, depriving the Pope of privacy and peace of mind - introducing strangers and photographers even into his bedroom.

There was no escape from stress and tension for John Paul I. Even in the inner sanctum of his private apartment, John Paul was suffering from blinding headaches, loneliness and claustrophobia. The only relief he got was in pacing around a concrete roof garden like a caged animal. By the second week of his Papacy his legs were swelling up to elephantine proportions.

John Paul was convinced that the Conclave had made a mistake. He was not the choice of the Holy Spirit. He was a usurper, a "poor" Pope, doomed. At every meal-time, says Magee, he would say, "Why did they choose me? Why on earth did they choose me?". According to John Paul I's Italian secretary, Don Diego Lorenzi, "... he was fed up with this world and he wanted only to die. He begged God to let him die."

A little more than 100 yards from the Pope's apartment stands the Vatican Health Service, with doctors and nurses on duty around the clock and a 24-hour pharmacy, large enough to serve 8,000 patients.

The Vatican's health facilities are first class, yet John Paul died without once having been seen by a Vatican doctor. According to Magee, the change-over from the Pope's previous doctor, Dr Giuseppe Da Ros, to the Papal doctor, Dr Renato Buzzonetti, had been made during the previous weekend, but the medical notes had not arrived at the Vatican.

As far as Buzzonetti is concerned the Vatican was not, and had never been, responsible for the Pope's health. It is an extraordinary irony that for nine hours through the night of September 29, six top specialists slaved over the Pope's corpse to preserve its appearance for protracted funeral pomps, and yet not one doctor can own to have been responsible for

his health during the last few days of his life when he was seriously ill and might well have been saved by timely treatment.

Pope John Paul I almost certainly died of a pulmonary embolus. He required rest and monitored medication. If these had been prescribed, he would almost certainly have survived. The warnings of a mortal illness were clear for all to see, the signs were ignored. Little or nothing was done to succour or to save him.

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1989 Wednesday

GRAPHIC: Three Illus: Pope John Paul I, left, ... there is ample evidence he believed his election to be a mistake and that his Papacy was doomed; above, Secretary of State Cardinal Jean Villot ... his miscalculation was disastrous; deputy director-general to the Vatican Health Service, Dr Renato Buzzonetti, right . . . he believed the Vatican was not responsible for the Pope's health.

LOAD-DATE: July 20, 2007

